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ABSTRACT

Reading and writing are both creative acts of communication that use written language as a vehicle for meaning. A strong theoretical case for teaching the two processes concurrently can be built by examining points of contact between reading and writing. One such point is context concerns. The Communication Triangle model (author/audience/ purpose) can be used to discuss readers' and writers' context concerns, which in turn guide peer review of writing as well as discussions of readings. An adaptation of this model (writer/ reader/subject) can both help begin the process of analyzing reading and guide the process of writing. Another point of contact between sophisticated reading and writing is main idea structure. A large body of research illustrates the power of developing a strategy (such as mapping) for locating the structure of main ideas for both comprehension and recall. Once the mapping strategy is familiar to students, it can be adapted for use as an organizational strategy for writing. Mapping can also be used to examine sentence structure (syntax), another point of contact between competent reading and writing. Students begin to visualize conceptual relationships, enabling them to break down difficult sentences in their reading and compose more accurate sentences in their own writing. Students should become more at ease with written language as a whole, as reading and writing are connected in their experience. (LLZ)

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Teaching Written Language: Points of Contact Between Sophisticated Reading and Writing

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Intuitively, reading and writing are companion processes, naturally learned together. Self-taught individuals speak of learning "to read and write" as if this were a single process. For example, Malcolm X (Autobiography of Malcolm X) tells us that once he could read and write, he had power to communicate with people not present in jail with him: people dead or not yet born, people in his own city or across the world. He says, "Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings (reading), my correspondence (writing), my visitors (results of writing)...and my readin of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisone . In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life." Reading and writing together became the key that unlocked his powerful mind, allowing him to communicate with people who could help him and with people whom he could help. Ultimately reading and writing are communication processes. It is communication which links them: they are both written language.

In the recent past, as educators we have separated reading from writing, conceiving of the two as separate "subjects" to be taught by different methods and different teachers. In fact, we have separated the two so thoroughly that we have assumed that reading instruction should be complete by the time a student is in the sixth grade (excepting the remedial student, of course) while writing instruction should continue into college. English teachers are

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relegated the major responsibility for teaching writing (attempts at writing across-the-curriculum, not withstanding), but no one is relegated any significant responsibility for teaching reading (attempts at content-area reading not withstanding). In large part, this divorce and unequal treatment of reading and writing have resulted from our definitions of the two: reading as a receptive act, writing as a creative act.

Those definitions, however, are beginning to blur. More and more researchers are examining the similarities of the two processes rather than the differences, and the differences are beginning to appear less significant than was once believed. Janet Emig ("Writing as a Mode of Learning") puts the relationship this way, "Writing is originating and creating a unique verbal construct that is graphically recorded. Reading is creating or re-creating but not originating a verbal construct that is graphically recorded." In other words, both the reader and the writer create meaning from written language: the writer originates the meaning; the reader does not.

The concept of a writer creating meaning is familiar; the concept of a reader creating meaning may be new. But the fact that meaning does not reside in text merely to be received by the reader can perhaps be most clearly seen by examining what happens when people read poetry. Louise Rosenblatt in The Reader, the Text, the Poem speaks of the "two-way transactional relationship" between the reader and the text. In short, different readers create different meanings from the same poem: many "correct" as they stay within the constraints of the text, many "incorrect" as they move beyond the boundaries of the text. Rosenblatt cites (p. 7) an example from her own teaching of a quatrain by Frost: "It Bids Pretty Fair."

IT BIDS PRETTY FAIR

The play seems out for an almost infinite run.
Don't mind a little thing like the actors fighting.
The only thing I worry about is the sun.
We'll be all right if nothing goes wrong with the lighting.

Robert Frost (1949)

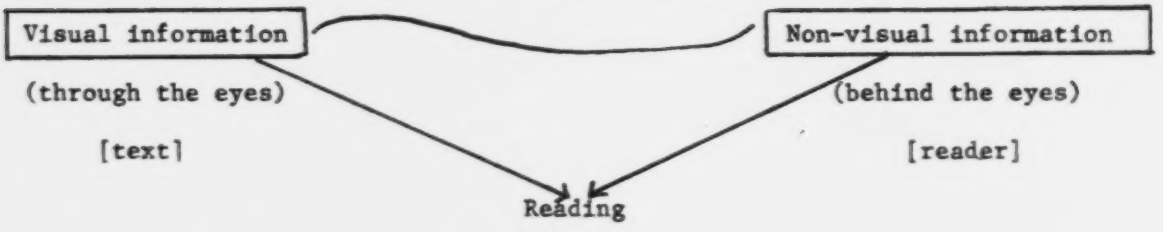
Student interpretations she has recorded range from "Upon reading...the first time, I couldn't make any sense out of it" (p. 7) to "Sounds as if it could be producer of a play giving encouragement to backers" (p. 7) to "At first it seemed a somewhat cynical statement about the nature of the theatre (my own experiences somehow forcing me mainly to envision the squabbling)." (p. 8) She goes on to say, "A few readers sensed the Olympian remoteness of the 'I' who could find it possible to view man's life on this planet in the light, almost of eternity, and who was this able to see as 'little things' such momentous episdodes as wars." (p. 9).

While poetry, growing out of the affective domain of our personalities as it does, illustrates most clearly the range of "correct meanings" possible from a written text, Rosenblatt's transactional theory can be applied to other types of reading as well. Rosenblatt herself makes a distinction between "efferent" (information-oriented reading) and "aesthetic" reading, but her own examples illustrate the point that in any reading the reader creates the meaning. One example (p. 24) she gives is of a mother frantically reading the label on a bottle of poisonous fluid from which her child has just drunk: the "meaning" of the label is the antidote, what to do next. If we expand Rosenblatt's example to include the same mother reading the same label in the grocery store as she compares two similar brands of cleaning fluid, the "meaning" of the label may be the versatility of the product. In both cases the mother, as reader, has

communicated with the writer of the label driven by her own purposes rather than by a "true meaning" residing in the print.

Psycholinguistic research into the strategies of competent readers supports Rosenblatt's thesis. This research has described two sources of information in reading: visual and non-visual. Frank Smith (Understanding Reading, p. 10) diagrams the concept like this:

Two Sources of Information in Reading



While psycholinguists acknowledge the necessity of visual information for the reader, they believe that non-visual information, information provided by the reader, is the core of reading.

Reading and writing, then, are both creative acts of communication which use written language as the vehicle for meaning. On this base we can build a strong theoretical case for teaching the two processes concurrently. As English teachers, we are particularly well-equipped for this task: we are expert readers and writers ourselves and we have made a systematic study of written language in its many forms. We already teach writing, but many of us feel inadequate to teach reading (unaware of our own expertise as we are). We believe in the importance of reading and writing for our students, but where do we begin?

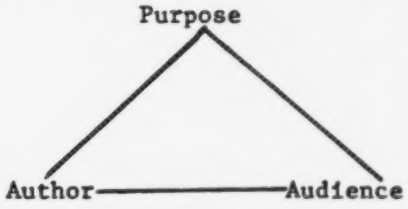
An important beginning place, I believe, is a theoretical discussion of written language (adjusted in depth, of course, for various levels of students). Often we attempt to teach students without first persuading them that the tasks we are setting them are valid and will help them. I have found the best way to

approach this discussion is getting the students to generate characteristics of written language. A good way to get at these concepts is to ask them to contrast written and spoken language. Since all of them feel competent with spoken language, this strategy helps them begin from the familiar and work toward the unfamiliar. Following is an example list generated by a class during such a discussion.

	Spoken Language	Written Language
Source	"natural" behavior	"academic" behavior
When Learned	develops earlier	develops later
Audience	present, can interact	absent; must be imagined; may be dead, alive, or unknown
Context	many supports (facial expressions, body language, questions	must stand alone
Time/Purpose	immediate/ephemeral	permanent record

Once the foundation has been laid and students begin to view written language as a whole, there are many points of contact for reading and writing. The first point of contact is the communication triangl .

The Communication Triangle



Using this heuristic, author/audience/purpose concerns can be discussed both for the students' own reading and for their writing. Context concerns are very important for readers--

who was the author?
when/where/under what conditions did he live?
what were his biases/political views?

who was the audience the author was aiming at--me or someone else?
how did his audience receive the piece?
what affect (if any) did the piece have on the audience?

what was the author's purpose in writing this?
did it fulfill his purpose or another?

Context concerns are equally important for writers--

who is my audience? is there more than 1?
what do they know about my subject?
how will they react to my views?

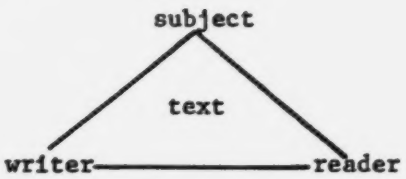
what is my purpose?
do I want to inform, entertain, persuade, or express myself?

what stance should I take as an author (tactful, blunt, sarcastic, humorous, cajoling, etc.)?

These questions, then, can be used to help guide reading as well as to plan writing. They can be used as a basis for peer commentary on writing as well as class discussion on reading.

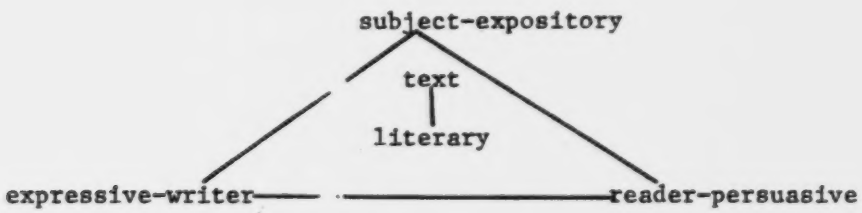
But the communication triangle can be used a second way as well. James Kinneavy ("The Basic Aims of Discourse") has adapted it to illustrate the basic aims of writing. Kinneavy's schematic looks like this:

In adapting Kinneavy's work for use with students examining both reading and writing, I have substituted more familiar, closely-synonymous terms in place of his. My schematic looks like this:



Depending on where the writer of the messages places his emphasis, different types of writing are produced. If the writer places his emphasis on his subject for the purpose of explaining or communicating information, the resulting piece of writing is expository is nature. If the writer places his emphasis on himself for the purpose of sharing his personal experiences, the resulting piece of writing is expressive in nature. When a writer's purpose is to cause the reader to do or believe something, the writing is persuasive. And if the writer's purpose is to create art, the writing is literary.

The schematic can be used to illustrate:



This systematic can be used to illustrate pure forms of writing for practice by beginning writers as well as hybrid forms encountered by readers. (For example, a writer of persuasive essay may use expository, expressive, or literary writing to sway his audience.)

Again, these concepts can be used to help begin the process of analyzing reading as well as to guide the process of writing. Author's purpose is an important concept to allow the reader to control the text, rather than the text controlling her. If a reader does not understand that the author's purpose was to persuade her, she is more likely to be swayed emotionally than if she recognizes that purpose. For writers it is an important concept for clarifying their own goals. Mixed goals can confuse a reader and cause the writing to fail.

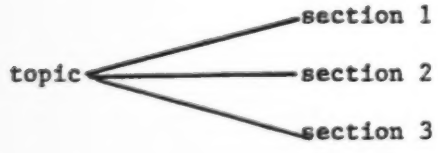
A further point of contact between sophisticated reading and writing is main idea structure (top-level structure). Once the author's major purpose has

been established, the next step is to determine where the main ideas are located in the text and how they are related to one another. The four major types of relationships that Bonnie Meyer ("The Structure of Prose") has identified are attribution, comparison contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution. Other patterns familiar to us from rhetoric are description, narration, process, definition, and classification. It is important to explain to students that these patterns can occur singly or in combination with one another.

Recognition of these patterns aids in locating main ideas, an extremely difficult task for readers. A large body of research is beginning to accumulate to illustrate the power of the strategy of locating the structure of the main ideas for both comprehension and recall. Bonnie Meyer has done perhaps the most work in this area. Other studies by Schwarz and Flammer; Taylor; Tierney, Bridge, and Cera; and Whaley support her findings. Recognizing the importance of this strategy, Joseph Vaughan ("Use the ConStruct Procedure") has developed a procedure for secondary-level readers to use to help them map the idea structures present in well-written text. Again, I have adapted Vaughan's procedure for use with my own students.

Purpose: To structure the main ideas in a prose passage into a form that is easy to recall.

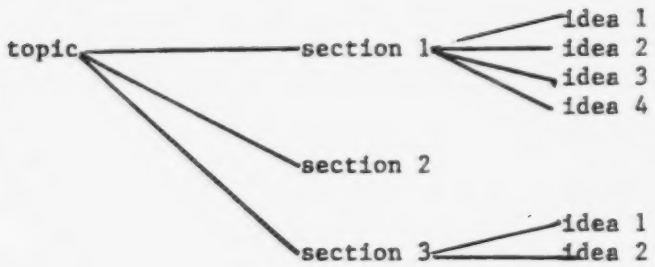
1. Skim the passage and map the topic and major divisions of the passage.



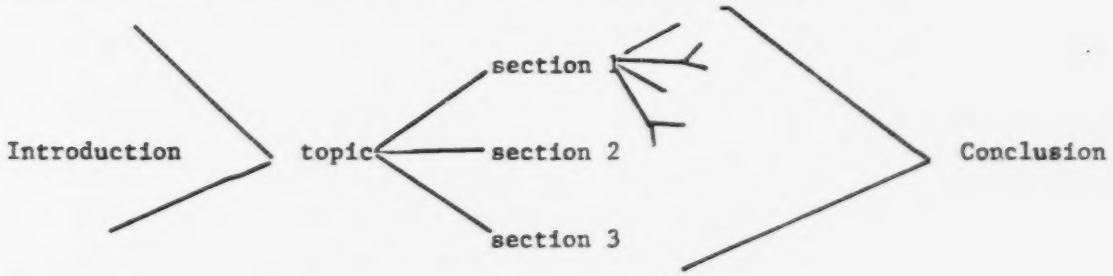
2. Study read the passage and map the major support concepts:

   (a) Do the sections you understand first;

(b) Go back to sections you did not understand and adjust the map as they become clear.



3. Scan the passage again and put the details into the map.



4. To set the memory, skim the passage and review the map.

But the top-level-structure strategy is not limited to reading. It can also be adapted to writing and used as an alternative to outlining as an organizational process. Mapping's advantages become evident once students learn the process:

(1) Mapping is easy to learn.

(2) It reflects more accurately the true structure of real text by providing flexibility.

(3) Disorganized text can be mapped and the ideas adjusted into a meaningful order.

Another point of contact between competent reading and writing is syntax, or sentence structure. In Teaching Reading Comprehension, Pearson and Johnson state that there is a good bit of evidence to suggest that longer and more complex sentences tend to appear in passages that are difficult for people to understand. In fact, many readability formulas are based on discovering the percentages of long sentences per 100 words. The answer to improving reading

comprehension would then seem to be re-writing text in shorter sentences. But Pearson has shown that there appears to be a trade-off between simplicity and explicitness. In other words, more complex sentences communicate more complex thoughts. His example (p. 16) illustrates:

WHY DID THE PEASANTS REVOLT?

(1) The peasants revolted because the king raised taxes.
(2) The king raised taxes. The peasants revolted.

Answer one is more explicit, clearer, and requires less inferencing than does answer two, even though answer two contains shorter sentences. So being able to comprehend more complex syntax is important for sophisticated readers.

Shaughnessy addresses the question of complex syntax in writing in Errors and Expectations. She states that important gains are made by the writer attempting to communicate complex thoughts in syntax which will mirror his thoughts. She likens this struggle to "a wrestling with Jacob's angel to claim one's meaning within the constraints of a specific situation." She goes on to say that "to extend considerations of syntax over large numbers of predications, to distinguish between subordinate and co-ordinate relationships, to ponder over syntactic options is to be engaged in thinking at a level of abstraction and with a degree of deliberation that is certain to affect not only a student's writing but his thinking as well." (p. 87)

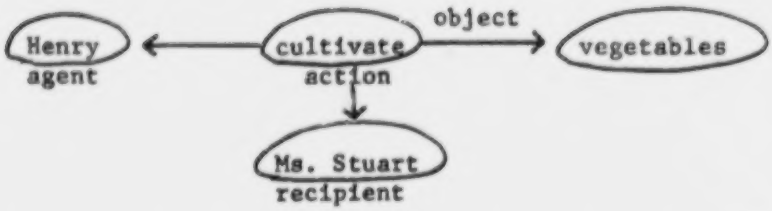
The problems with syntax that tend to affect both the competent reader and the competent writer appear to be co-ordination and subordination, transitional expressions, and parallelism.

Two good ways to help students begin to deal with these concepts are semantic maps and sentence combining. Pearson and Johnson explain semantic mapping thoroughly in Teaching Reading Comprehension, but a brief introduction to the process will illustrate its usefulness for helping students deal with

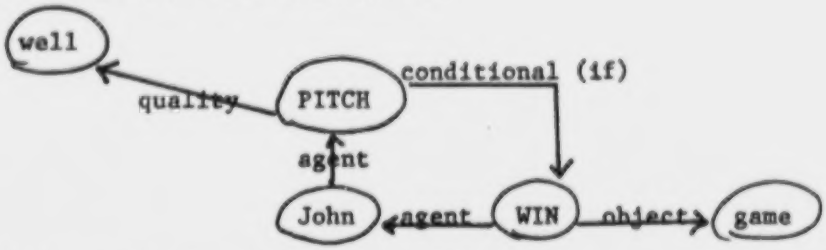
complex syntax. Pearson and Johnson (p. 39) list 12 possible components of an event:

Action	The event itself. In a sentence, the action is usually described by a verb: The horse was bitten by a fly.
Agent	The actor who has caused the action to take place: The horse was bitten by a fly.
Instrument	The thing or device that caused or implemented the event: The hail destroyed the tomatoes. The people traveled to Madison by boat.
Conditional	A logical condition that exists between two events: John will win the game if he pitches well.
Cause	A causal condition that exists between two events: John laughed at Henry because Henry wore a funny mask.
Location	The place where the event takes place. Often two different locations are involved, one at the start of the event and one at the conclusion. These are identified as from and to locations. Henry went to town. Susan traveled from Minneapolis to Madison.
Object	The thing that is affected by the action: Henry thanked Matthew.
Purpose	Identifies the purpose of the event: Matthew went to town to buy some candy.
Quality	A descriptor, one that modifies a concept: The day was humid. There are fourteen people in our new class.
Recipient	The person who is the receiver of the effect of the action: John gave the drum to Susan.
Time	When an event takes place: I will go to town a week from Tuesday.
Truth	Used primarily for false statements: Henry does not cultivate vegetables.

The purpose, then, is to classify what is happening in the sentence (Henry cultivates vegetables for Ms. Stuart), beginning with the verb (p. 38). Arrows help clarify how the other words are related to the verb.



In a more complex situation, semantic mapping shows the relationship between different clauses in the sentence:



While semantic maps can become tedious if over-used, they provide a way of making the abstraction of complex syntax more concrete. They help students who are having difficulty begin to visualize conceptual relationships. After practice with the different possibilities, the sentence patterns begin to become familiar to the student and, thus, easily accessed for both reading and writing.

Sentence combining provides a second strategy for helping students with sophisticated syntax. By getting students to write complex sentences, sentence combining practice helps them tap the intuitive knowledge they already possess in speech. And because there is no one right answer, students can compare results and gain even more from each other. One approach to sentence combining (Daiker, Kerek, Morenberg) follows:

1. Begin with a cluster of simple sentences on one topic.

   The referee blew his whistle.
   The referee called to the team captains.
   The referee dropped the puck.
   The referee began the game. (p. 2)

2. Combine into a single sentence, using as many different patterns as you can think of.

   A. The referee blew his whistle, called to the team captains, and then dropped the puck to begin the game.

B. After blowing his whistle and calling to the team captains, the referee dropped the puck and began the game.
C. The referee blew his whistle and, calling to the team captains, dropped the puck to begin the game.
D. The game began after the referee blew his whistle, called to the team captains, and dropped the puck.
E. The referee blew his whistle, called to the team captains, dropped the puck, and began the game. (p. 2-3)

3. Use sentence combining to illustrate particular sentence structures and provide practice in using those structures.

Example: relative clauses (use which)

1. Walden Pond is now the site of many tourist stands.
2. Walden Pond was once praised by Thoreau for its natural beauty.

Walden Pond, which was once praised by Thoreau for its natural beauty, is no the site of many tourist stands.

OR

Walden Pond, which is now the site of many tourist stands, was once praised by Thoreau for its natural beauty. (p. 28)

Once these strategies are conquered, students can use them to locate and break down particularly difficult sentences in their reading as well as to generate more accurate sentences in their own writing. Students working in groups of two or three can help each other.

These, then, are a few of the points of contact between competent reading and writing. A holistic teaching of the two processes places both reading and writing in the larger context of written language. Just as speaking and understanding spoken language are learned together by young children in the larger context of oral language, so reading and writing can be learned together. Attempting to learn them separately handicaps a student attempting to learn written language, just as being deaf or mute handicaps children attempting to learn oral language.

Students can read examples of the work of professional writers or of their peers before they are asked to write specific assignments or they can write first and read examples of other people's work later. And as reading and

writing are connected in their experience, their ease with written language as a whole will increase.

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